THE INNER COMMUNITY TIMES

The Church Behind the Prison Wall

August 2004
Vacaville, California

Connecting the Body of Christ inside and outside of prison with harmony and unity

Lisa Ames
Member of
Community
Prison Choir

COMMUNITY PRISON CHOIR

"Doing my best was important because it helped the rest of the choir do its best."

The Lord impressed me with the importance of realizing that this is HIS ministry; my role in the choir is essentially about Him. I needed to practice unity with a group of over twenty people, most of whom I had never met. We listened to each other's words, vocal tones, and rhythm, seeking to complement one another, not displaying our own talent. Many of us are accustomed to singing to ourselves, alone, or in the car. Being a choir member, each person needs to blend and be "one" with each other.

Doing my best was important because it helped the rest of the choir do its best. Likewise my irresponsible times of not practicing affected everyone else. We are all accountable to each other! It isn't about our individual ministries but our singular purpose, Jesus, and His glory. We need to recognize our individual gifts then use them to the best of our ability within the body of Christ, deliberately working to move as one church. Unity is so important; it was one of the last prayers of Jesus for his church.

One night during my solo I remember suddenly feeling weak and numb. I nearly lost my grip on the microphone as a tingling sensation ran up my arm. Just as the pressure was enough to silence my voice, a precious sister in the choir stepped out in faith and put her hand on my back, praying. I felt immediate strength return to my voice. It was a true experience of ministering as part of a whole and it blessed those around us.

John 17 says the world will know us by our love for each other and our unity! I know the worship we brought broke strongholds in the prison; we witnessed that by the many responses of the men to the promise of abundant life here and now through the Gospel. I was encouraged to sing before men who would worship God in the midst of prison and even more so when they saw me struggle to sing and they encouraged me!

At one facility, an inmate was asked to sing "Amazing Grace." The atmosphere rippled with the

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Are You Willing To Do What Jesus Did?

Timothy May
Prison Ministry
Director

Scripture tells us of the price the Father paid to bring salvation to the human race. The Father sent His Son as a sacrifice to save the world. That Son, Jesus, paid the ultimate price for you and me and provided instructions on how we should live our lives to fulfill our purpose.

John 4:1-42, when Jesus met the Samaritan woman at the well, He provided the encounter to serve as an example because the Samaritans were members of a hated mixed race, the Samaritan woman was known to be living in sin, and she was in a public place. Through this, Jesus instructs us the Gospel is for everyone no matter what his or her race, social position, or past sins.

The reading in Matthew 10:1, 8, teaches us that He gave power to the disciples that we should heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons and, in Matthew 25:36, visit the prisoner. Thus, Matthew describes to us acts of mercy that do not depend on our wealth, ability, or intelligence. Jesus commanded us to care for others needs. Our acts are to be freely given and freely received.

Many of us believers say we want to be like Jesus. However, do we really want to do what Jesus did to see the sinner saved? Do we, as believers, who live in the reality of our comfort zone, daring not to step into new areas of challenge or doing what Jesus did? I would ask you, are you willing to be like Jesus? Are you willing to follow His example? We, as believers, have been commanded to take the Gospel message to the world and make disciples, baptizing in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus told us that if we believe in Him we would do greater things than He.

If we are to be like Jesus we must be willing to touch the sinner and be touched by the sinner. When the Lord came to save the human race, He touched the world by taking on our nature, without taking our pollution. So we, too, must touch the sinner, without taking on his or her sin or participating in sin.

Jesus prayed for us as believers, however, He also expected us to show our belief in Him through our words and actions. If you don't speak the Truth, how would others know they have sin? But when you speak and live the Truth, sinners will have no excuse. Yes, let no one have an excuse. If you are willing to do what Jesus did, remember that He has already given you gifts, talents, passions, interest, capabilities, and will provide strategic opportunities, so that you *will* affect the world through Him.❖

I didn't realize what I was doing until I was saved

KEM
A Brother in Christ at California State Prison-Solano

INMATE TESTIMONY

I was trained to be an alcoholic. Allow me to explain this statement: At an early age (about 10) my dad would give my brother and me a drink of his beer. Don't think for one minute that I'm blaming my dad because I'm not! I take full responsibility for my actions. I know my dad did not know any better. He was trained the same way. At holidays, it was how much you could drink, not how much your family meant. It was all about self. As I grew up I continued to drink then added other drugs, sex, of course was at the center of it all.

"I felt like I had a hole inside of me that I needed to fill, somehow, or someway."

I didn't realize what I was doing until I was saved. Looking back, now, I was looking for love and affection—something I didn't have at home—in an alcoholic, abusive environment. Again I don't blame my dad or my mother for not doing anything, they aren't saved. The best description I can give is this: I felt like I had a hole inside of me that I needed to fill, somehow, or someway. So, I started with beer, which escalated to hard liquor, then to drugs of all kinds. I had to keep doing this over and over, the more I did, the more I needed. Again, sex played a big part. But all of this was just a temporary satisfaction. I was always looking for anyone to like or accept me, while going through numerous relationships, none of which ever filled that hole.

Which brings me to the pinnacle of my fall. I allowed and participated in inappropriate sexual behavior. Knowing it was not right, yet, I allowed it to continue for about a year, with the full knowledge that it was wrong. This is just a glimpse of how far out there I was. A few years later I was arrested, which was the best thing that could have ever happened to me because I was plucked out of that downward spiral to hell, which I was on. I sat in county jail (a blessing) where I had time to ask myself, "What went wrong?" Before long, within a month or so, I was reading the Bible and doing a little Bible study. Two months later, (January 17, 1998) I received Jesus as my Lord and Savior. It wasn't very long after that, that I started feeling that hole, that I'd spent nearly 30 years trying to fill, being filled with the love of Christ. He had always been there.

Looking back, I can see where God had been calling me for at least 13 years prior to my salvation. I know now, that I was not being the man of God I was created to be. Nevertheless, I do know what God wants from me now: to serve Him with all my heart and soul; pressing on to the goal He has set before me, while thanking Him always for the gift of salvation.❖

Each time we sing, the Holy Spirit shows up

Janell Michael
Member of Community Prison Choir

COMMUNITY PRISON CHOIR

"I am thankful for the times I have gone into the prisons to sing. There is purpose in what we are doing and great satisfaction in knowing we play a part in God's Great Commission."

Barbed wire tops each fence; towers with officers dressed in green look down upon us, as jackrabbits hop across the lawn. This is what greeted us as the choir entered California State Prison-Solano. California Medical Facility-Vacaville (CMF) has a different feeling, one of stepping back in time to the 1940's or 50's. The walls seem to contain the ghosts of past lives; if those walls could talk they would reveal tales of past inhabitants such as Charles Manson, among countless others. On the other hand, driving to Sierra Conservation Center-Jamestown, you might think that you had arrived at a campground. The area is surrounded by trees, green lawns, beautiful flowers, and dotted with rustic carvings of bears. Regardless of each facility we visited, I have felt the peace of the Lord go with me.

The choir has the same purpose at each prison; encourage our brothers in the Lord, and bring the Gospel message to those who may never have heard of God's love and sacrifice for all of us. Our hope is to set the captives free. Each of us has an opportunity to greet the men and offer God's blessing with a handshake and a smile. I have made a point to look each inmate in the eye so he will know my sincerity. So much can be said for the looks I get in return. You can see the joy of Jesus in some, appreciation in others, but it's the eyes that are empty or refuse to return my gaze that my heart goes out to.

I love to watch the men's reactions to our singing. The inmates sing along regardless of knowing the words. It doesn't matter if we hit every note or the disc with recorded music works correctly. These men are happy we came; I've witnessed more standing ovations than I've ever seen at any concert! Is it because we are so good? I don't think so.

This is so much bigger than just putting on a performance for a group of men. Each time we sing, the Holy Spirit shows up. We see how He touches hearts and moves men to respond to the Gospel message. We witness the miracle of salvation each time a hand is raised responding to the altar call. What a privilege we have been given!

At Jamestown we heard a remarkable rendition of "Amazing Grace" by an inmate, his voice would rival any Broadway performance. At CMF, the inmate chapel choir led us in worship while we waited for the rest of the men to arrive for our performance. I think we may have even been visited by "angels unaware" as several of us remember an angelic looking "grandpa" with a cane sitting on the front row listening to us at two different facilities!

I am thankful for the times I have gone into the prisons to sing. There is

"Each time we sing" continued on page 8

Easter Outreach 2004

EVANGELISTIC OUTREACH

This past Easter, the Community Prison Choir, sponsored by Vaca Valley Christian Life Center, presented the musical "*The Love of Jesus*" to the following prison facilities: California State Prison-Solano, California Medical Facility-Vacaville, and Sierra Conservation Center-Jamestown, California.

Of the 1100 inmates who had the opportunity to attend one of these presentations, 164 new-believer registrations have been received from men either making a first-time commitment or recommitment to Christ. These inmates are then sent a Bible study to complete on their own. The Bible study, written by Regina McCollam, is a six-part series specifically designed for new believers and has become an additional evangelistic tool. The Bible study series is also posted at the Ebenezer Outreach Ministry website, http://www.ebrock.org

Participating Churches

Christian Life Center, Vacaville
First Assembly of God, Fairfield
Trinity Baptist, Vacaville

Production Team

Kim Taylor, Choir Director
Mike Certini, Sound
Phil Loyd, Narrator
Katie May, Narrator
Katie May, Security / Escort
John Williams, Security / Escort

Choir Members

Carolina Aguardo
Lisa Ames
Bill Barr
Cathy Blank
Hank Blank
Terrie Camara
Marlee Certini
Delbert Edwards
Edward Floresca
Nancy Gould
Judy Handa
Ron Handa
Jeanine Havlicek
Tim May
Regina McCollam
Janell Michael
Ruth Mitchell
Judy Moran
Tonya Morant
Janice Nichols
Paula Polfliet
Allen Potter
Jolene Queen
Verna Ringler
Millie Schlegel
Elnora Smith
James Stanton
Tonya Stanton
Daryl Stewart
Janette Tallant
Delores Taylor
James Walton
Clarrisa Watkins

A special thank you to the following:

Senior Pastor Raleigh Galgan and Bill Compton of Valley Church, Vacaville, California for the use of the church van.

Thank you to our driver, Tonya Van Stanten, for volunteering to drive the choir to Sierra Conservation Center-Jamestown, California.❖

The Prison Ministry Team

Mike and Marlee Certini

Mike and Marlee Certini were born and raised in Visalia, California, but did not meet and marry until after college—after being set up on a blind date by their parents! They married in 1990 and have two daughters, Debbie and Kristi. They relocated to Vacaville in 1998 when Mike changed jobs and have attended Vaca Valley Christian Life Center (CLC) since then.

Mike became a Christian in college after attending a Bible study with a friend and has served the Lord faithfully ever since. Mike has served as an usher at CLC for four years. Marlee became a Christian in 1976 and at an early age wanted to become involved in missions. Marlee has traveled with HealthCare Missions to Ecuador and Argentina as a translator in college, and most recently to Brazil with Global Awakenings. Since 1993, Marlee has been active both in the choir and as a part of the worship team.

Marlee became involved with Prison Ministry at CLC in November 2002. She started by singing with Kim Taylor and the Prison Choir, and has continued since then. Mike began coming to the prison in the summer of 2003, and currently handles our soundboard for the musicals.

Mike and Marlee have been incredibly blessed by the outpouring of God's grace in their lives as they have reached out to their brothers in Christ in the prisons. Through this ministry, Mike and Marlee have seen their abilities grow and mature as they released, what seemed to be so little, to the Lord to use, as He desired. "When you use the talents and gifts that God has given you to minister to those in need, God multiplies all that you give and anoints you for even more."

What has been the most amazing is the humility and graciousness of the Christian men and women in prison. They are so grateful that you come to minister and we always leave more encouraged than when we came. Many times when Marlee has ministered on a Tuesday evening, she may come in tired and somewhat disheartened after a long workday, but after ministering in prison, she always comes out encouraged in the Lord and blessed beyond measure! Once you are in prison ministry long enough, you know that you will never go into a prison to minister and come back the same!

Participating Churches

Christian Life Center, Vacaville

Grace Fellowship, Dixon

Presbyterian Church, Fairfield

Trinity Baptist, Vacaville

Mike and Marlee look forward to seeing the many men and women saved and to encourage their brothers and sisters who are incarcerated. They know God's heart is toward the downtrodden and they feel blessed and privileged to be allowed to minister in the prisons…*"Remember the prisoners as though in prison with them." Hebrews 13:3*❖

Gerald Dayce

Gerald is a native New Yorker, born in Brooklyn and has served the Lord for over forty years. At an early age, Gerald's parents discovered that he was anointed to sing and they encouraged him to do so at every opportunity the Lord presented. He was singing on stage at the age of eight. Gerald grew up in the toughest part of town where gangs ruled the streets. Many times seeing the violence first hand, he often had to fight just to make it to school. Nevertheless, even at that age he loved the Lord with all his heart.

After high school, Gerald joined the United States Army and served for nearly three years. During his tour of duty, Gerald sang in a variety of venues; however, he remained faithful to his Gospel roots. It was during this time he began to go into the prisons. While stationed at Fort Lewis, Washington, he met his future wife. Gerald and Melodie have been married for nearly twenty-five years and have two sons: Ronald 17, and Lee 11.

Gerald has toured Germany, Switzerland, Italy and Turkey singing the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; but the most rewarding experiences have been his times of sharing behind the walls of various state and federal prisons. Gerald says he has come to love the inmates and he is thankful for his relationship with Pastor Tim May, who was not just looking for singers, but looking for people with a heart for prison ministry. One thing Gerald promises is that when the inmates see him, he will give them all he has to give.❖

Team Members

Cathy Blank	Hank Blank	Marlee Certini	Mike Certini	Jerry Dayce
John Haaf	Bill Holland	Cindy Mares	Katie May	Tim May
David Michaels	Norbert Moreno	Paula Polfliet	Jolene Queen	Fermin Rubio
Daryl Stewart	Kim Taylor	Jim Walton	John Williams	

The most precious night of my life

James W.
A Brother in Christ at California State Prison-Solano

INMATE TESTIMONY

"I felt tingling from my head down my spine and my spirit soared free from the chains that bind me."

Last night was the most beautiful and precious night of my life. Because God sent His earthly Angels into this concrete and steel vestige of insanity to shine His glorious light into the darkness, through the Angelic voices of His saints!

I have been in prison for 27 years. A non-conformist outlaw, chained within the belly of the beast, void of hope, lost and alone. But as I listened to the choir sing about Jesus and the "true meaning" of Christmas, it was as if the cold ashes of my soul were rekindled into a flame. I was also moved to tears by the beautiful and inspiring voice of the narrator. I felt tingling from my head down my spine and my spirit soared free from the chains that bind me. For the first time in my life, I felt the healing touch of our Savior upon my heart.

Through you, I have received the witness of the Spirit in my own heart and I testify before God, Angels, and men without fear of the consequences that I know our redeemer lives! From the bottom of my heart, thank you for coming into my life and bringing Jesus and the Joy of Christmas with you. I will never forget your faces, your beautiful voices or the inspiration you gave unto me and those here with me. May our Heavenly Father bless each of you and yours, as you have blessed me with your love and compassion.❖

Excerpt from a letter sent to Pastor Tim May.

"Connecting"

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pel. I was encouraged to sing before men who would worship God in the midst of prison and even more so when they saw me struggle to sing and they encouraged me!

At one facility, an inmate was asked to sing "Amazing Grace." The atmosphere rippled with the deep bass tones of his praise. There were tears in so many of our eyes, including the inmates. It was beautiful to hear such a gift in that place, how unexpected! The Prison Choir connected the body of Christ on the "outside" with the Body on the inside and helped each other grow. We created an atmosphere of unity for others to see Christ. I didn't just meet men in prison; I met Jesus and experienced His heart.

Thank you, and God Bless you Pastor Tim. I learned so much more from this experience than I expected about the body of Christ and about sharing what I have from God, even when it isn't "perfect."❖

Lisa attends Vaca Valley Christian Life Center; this was her first year participating in the choir.

"Each time we sing"

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gone into the prisons to sing. There is purpose in what we are doing and great satisfaction in knowing we play a part in God's Great Commission. I think I walk away being blessed far more than the men we meet. It probably won't be until we are in heaven that we will see the magnitude of God's plan for the men held captive in our time and space, but forever free in His.❖

Janell and her family attend Vaca Valley Christian Life Center; this was her second year participating in the choir.

Thank you for the Bible studies

INMATE TESTIMONY

Erwin J.
A Brother in Christ at California State Prison-Solano

I'm writing this note to thank you for bringing me to the Lord; the Bible studies have opened up my eyes to understand the real price that my Lord paid for our sins. That is very heart touching. I never realized how much the Lord really loves us. I am dedicating my life to serve Him now.

Oftentimes I find myself day-dreaming, watching Jesus being crucified at Calvary. I imagine the pain He went through while being beaten beyond recognition then being nailed to a cross. Since you have been sending the Bible studies to me, I have been searching through the Scriptures, praying and asking the Lord to reveal more of His Word in my heart. It feels as though a veil has been lifted from my eyes and I can now see exactly what I have been missing all my life, His words of tender caring and love.

I'm very thankful to your many lessons in ministry of the Gospel. Thank you for providing the opportunity for me to change my outlook on life. I am grateful to you.❖

Excerpt from a letter to Pastor Tim May commenting on the Bible studies being sent as an additional Evangelistic outreach.

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Renewed Passion

Star Chis
Missionary to Roman

It 's been two years since I visited California State Prison-Solano (CSP). Solomon and I have been in Romania starting a new ministry the Lord called us to. Pastor Tim heard we were coming home for a time of refreshing and asked us if we would be willing to minister in the yards of CSP. Having ministered at this prison prior to our departure from Vacaville, we said we would. But we were not prepared for the change we saw in these men!

As the inmates entered the chapel we were blessed to see the many faces we knew and who had remembered us so fondly. The service began with an inmate leading worship; there was a sweet presence of the Holy Spirit during this time, we had not experienced this before. It was awesome and we were amazed at being in the same facility among the same inmates who two years ago were hesitant to lift their hands to worship! What a difference time and prayer makes.

There are times in our ministry where we feel like we aren't breaking any ground and maybe we should just give in. But our experience at Yard 3, on that Tuesday night, reminded us through perseverance we will have breakthrough and growth will occur!

I encourage everyone who is involved with prison ministry; keep fighting the good fight. And to anyone who is not involved, take a chance, come and see what God will do when you keep on "keeping on!"❖

Missionaries Star and Solomon Chis are home in the United States on sabbatical from Romania.

Women on the outside "doing time" with their inmate loved ones

Reprinted from *Kairos Outside/ Sacramento Valley News*

KAIROS OUTSIDE

Kairos Outside/Sacramento Valley Chapter, California, provides a Christian retreat weekend, free of charge, for approximately 50 women guests who have loved ones incarcerated in federal or state prisons. Retreat participants include a team of 35 Kairos Outside supporters. If one thinks of the vast number of inmates within the state of California, one knows there are as many people outside of prison who are families of prisoners and who need Kairos Outside.

Kairos Outside is a prison ministry under the umbrella of KAIROS, an international prison ministry for inmates. We are proud to say male inmates of San Quentin completed their 24th Kairos retreat weekend this past February. On that same weekend, female inmates of Chowchilla completed their first Kairos retreat weekend after 17 years of hard work trying to get on the "inside."

What is Kairos Outside?

Kairos Outside was developed for women on the outside "doing time" with their inmate loved ones. Although these women are free and live outside, they suffer the sentence just as if they were involved in the crime, oftentimes blamed by society and deprived of a normal life. Many of these women raise families on their own, some have lost their homes, friends, or jobs, all this in addition to supporting the incarcerated loved one.

Agape weekends

Kairos Outside offers a weekend of Christian love and comfort for these women. They are showered with agape gifts, music, food, sharing of stories, prayer, and fun. It is truly an uplifting and wonderful weekend offering hope, communal empathy, and an avenue of emotional release from a kindred background.

Community support

Kairos Outside also offers community support for these women, gathering together in Prayer and Share groups. We work in collaboration with the Kairos prison teams and work to raise funds within the community. For example, we raised over $1000 at a Silent Auction where artwork from inmates was sold at a dinner hosted at Vaca Valley Christian Life Center, Vacaville, California. We use discount benefits from community businesses such as Michael's, JoAnn Fabrics, Office Max, Kinko's, Albertson's, and Safeway supporting both our retreat weekends and training meetings for those weekends.

New chapter

Kairos Outside has a new chapter in the Sacramento Valley area. We are currently developing our groundwork in the community with church presentations and additional fundraisers. ❖

If you would like to learn more about Kairos Outside, call Mary Trancho at (530) 759-8484, or email her at, mtrancho@accessbee.com. If you are in need of support, please contact Kairos Outside to find out when the next retreat weekend will be held.

FIRST LOVE

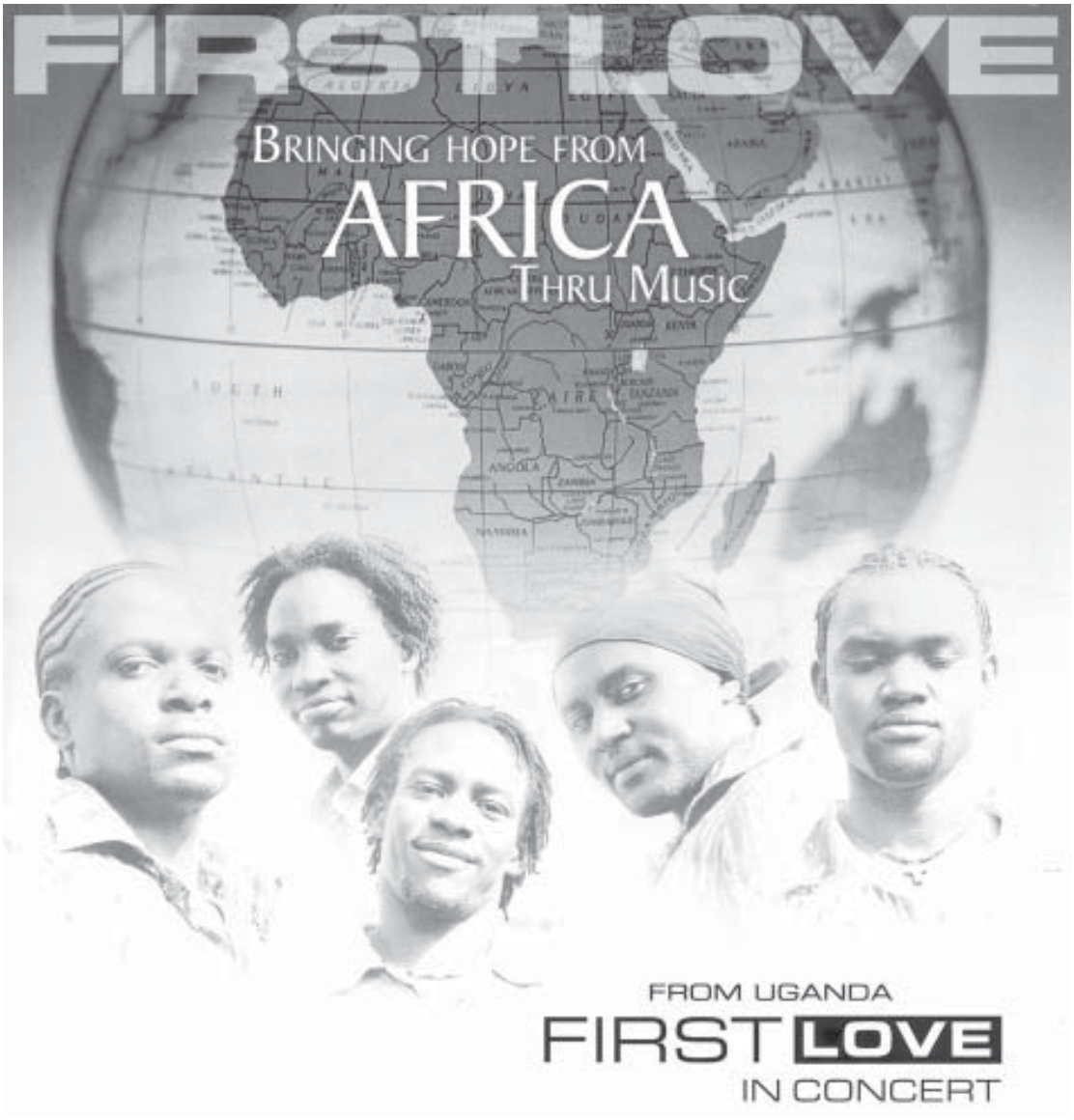
God's Ambassadors from Uganda

The vocal group, FIRST LOVE, was invited to minister this June to the inmates at California State Prison-Solano, Vacaville, California. They brought their music and message from Africa to Yards 3 and 4. This was the first time the group performed in a prison; they stated the experience was far different from what they had anticipated. The inmates responded to the music and the Gospel message in a manner that was awe-inspiring to each member of the group.

FIRST LOVE's unique blend of motivational and uplifting African melodies inspires audiences of every age and background. FIRST LOVE is dedicated to sharing, through music and messages, the love of Jesus Christ and challenging everyone to live moral, upright and God-filled lives.

FIRST LOVE is a high-energy team comprised of five young men from Uganda, Africa. They have ten years of concert experience in much of Africa and Europe. The group is now touring the United States, appearing in 22 different states, including an appearance at the United Nations in New York.

The group will be on tour through October 2004. To schedule a performance contact: John N. Miller, Coordinator, FIRST LOVE Ministries, 2222 Emory Road, Reisterstown, MD 21136, Phone: (410) 374-8142 Fax: (410) 374-3543, Email: firstlove2g@yahoo.com. Visit the website at: http://www.planetfirstlove.com.❖



"All of Me"

Kim Taylor issues her first compact disk recording

Kim Taylor has been serving the Lord for the past seventeen years with a voice that soars to the heavens. She has ministered through anointed song and as guest speaker at women's conferences and retreats throughout the Deep South and Northern California. In June of this year, she issued her first full-length CD, "*All of Me,*" which is already receiving wide acceptance.

At one time, along with a visitation team, she ministered to Death Row inmates at Parchment Maximum Security Prison, the very prison which housed the man who murdered her best friend. Through the awesome grace of God and the compassion of the cross that she shares because of the love of the Lord, she was able to forgive this man and minister to him.

She continues to minister in federal and state prisons and serves in a leadership and worship capacity with Ebenezer Outreach Ministry. Her testimony of service to the Lord is powerful.

To schedule a concert of uplifting song and music or purchase the CD, contact O'Guinn Productions, PO Box 1244, Vacaville, California 95696-1244 or call (707) 447-1523 or (707) 592-7106. The email address for O'Guinn Productions, is: david@oguinnproductions.com or visit the website at http://www.oguinnproductions.com.❖

Accepted

© Constance Vanides
June 13, 2004

I love each one I've created,
filled you with My Spirit,
so you, in serving one another,
will be serving Me as well.
I take you each as you are.
I accept your willingness to follow Me
and create in you a new person,
filled with My life, My mind, My love.
To My surrendered ones
do I give all this and much more.
Go, therefore into all the world
with My message of truth.

http://www.godcares.org